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## The Star-Ledger

### ' He was a Marine, and we take care of our own.'

**Veterans young and old assure WWII hero priest will get full military burial**

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**BY JUDY PEET**

**Star-Ledger Staff**

Once again, the Marines got the job done.

Outraged over a claim by the U.S. Navy that it did not have the resources to grant war hero Monsignor Paul F. Bradley's last wish -- to be buried with full military honors -- retired Marines across New Jersey went on the offensive yesterday.

Elderly veterans who remembered Bradley's extraordinary bravery and compassion as a Marine chaplain on Iwo Jima during World War II joined with younger Marines who never heard of Bradley but felt he had been "dissed by his government," as one explained.

They began working the phones early in the day. They called politicians including acting Gov. Richard Codey, recruiting offices, Marine Corps headquarters in Quantico, Va., and Navy regional headquarters in Connecticut.

They struck a particularly responsive chord with U.S. Sen. Jon Corzine, a former Marine reservist. By late afternoon, the mission was accomplished.

Military casket bearers, flag folders and a bugler -- representing both the Marines and the Navy -- will be at the 11 a.m. funeral Mass today at St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church in Long Branch and at Bradley's burial in Holy Cross Cemetery in Brooklyn.

A rifle team will provide a graveside salute, and police from Long Branch, New York City and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey will provide an escort accompanying the hearse between Long Branch and Brooklyn.

Sailors and Marines from New Jersey, Brooklyn, the Bronx and Connecticut will be represented at the funeral and burial. Bradley will get his final wish.

"It's the kind of send-off Monsignor Bradley wanted, and we weren't going to give up until he got it," said Julius Spohn, a retired Marine from Newark who even rounded up Iwo Jima veterans -- all in their 80s -- to

pay their respects at the monsignor's viewing last night.

"He was a Marine, and we take care of our own."

The 6th Motor Transportation Battalion, a Marine reserve unit based in Middletown, played a key role, providing three Marine reservists and recruiting three Navy men to serve as casket bearers and members of a rifle team. They will be joined by a contingent of three Navy reservists from the Bronx.

The efforts on Bradley's behalf began when the Navy told The Star-Ledger on Thursday that it can no longer provide full military honors to retired veterans. A Navy spokesman said the service has neither the money nor the manpower to fully staff a funeral for anyone who isn't either active military or a Medal of Honor recipient.

Although the monsignor, 91, spent most of his 26-year career assigned as chaplain to the Marines, burial detail still lay with the Navy because he enlisted in the Navy.

Ordained in 1941, he joined the Navy after Pearl Harbor. Bradley requested to be assigned to a Marine infantry unit because he knew the kind of suffering that would be found at the battlefield, said author Steve Rabey, who featured the monsignor in his book, "Faith Under Fire."

The priest said Mass from an altar made from ammo boxes in a shell crater atop Mount Suribachi as the Japanese heaved grenades from nearby caves. Unarmed and helmetless, wearing only a battered green cap with a gold cross on the visor, he followed the infantry as they stormed machine gun nests, sustaining horrible casualties.

That same green cap lay next to his casket last night during viewing hours.

John Holle, a corporal in the Fourth Marine Division, said he landed on Iwo Jima at the same time as Bradley's unit. Although he did not know Bradley at the time, he came to know him years later through his sister-in-law, who was a member of Bradley's parish.

Holle was one of six members of the West Hudson Detachment of the Marine Corps League who paid their respects last night at Our Lady Star of the Sea Roman Catholic Church in Long Branch.

"It brings back a lot of memories," the 82-year-old Bloomfield resident said. "It's an honor to be able to be here and to thank God you're here."

Most soldiers went home after the war ended, but Bradley-- who received the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart -- kept on for another two decades, through Korea and Vietnam. Named monsignor shortly before his retirement from the military, he was assigned to St. Michael's in Long Branch, where he stayed until he retired in 1989 at age 75.

More than 4,000 people protested his retirement, said state Sen. Joseph Palaia (R-Monmouth), a friend and parishioner for more than 30 years.

The diocese would not relent, but Bradley continued to work as a weekend assistant at St. John the Baptist Church in Long Branch, even after he lost his eyesight in 1994.